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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002596

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [IR](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: UPDATE ON TERRORISM CASES

REF: A. A: CAIRO 1978

[1](#)B. B: 04 CAIRO 8967

[1](#)C. C: 04 CAIRO 8594

[1](#)D. D: 04 CAIRO 8195

[1](#)E. E: 04 CAIRO 7851

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) An emergency court in Cairo convicted and sentenced on March 28 an Egyptian national and an Iranian diplomat (the latter in absentia) on charges of involvement in both a 2004 act of terrorism in Saudi Arabia and in conspiring to commit acts of terrorism in Egypt, including planning an assassination attempt against President Mubarak. Separately, on March 30, Egypt's Public Prosecutor announced the indictment of three Egyptians (two of whom are in custody) for their involvement in the October 7 terrorist attacks in and around the Sinai resort of Taba which killed 34. While the indictments represent progress in the Taba investigation, the GOE's earlier assertions that it had uncovered the full extent of the conspiracy remain in doubt, particularly in the context of the continuing detention of a disputed number of persons, mainly of Bedouin origin, in the Sinai. End summary.

Iranian Destabilization Plot

[1](#)2. (U) On March 28, following a brief trial, an emergency court convened in Cairo convicted and sentenced an Egyptian national and an Iranian diplomat for planning and conspiring to commit acts of terrorism (see ref B for more background). The Egyptian, Mahmoud Eid Mohammed Dabbous, was sentenced to a total of 35 years in maximum security prison. Dabbous received 10 years for his role in a May 2004 attack on a petrochemical plant in Saudi Arabia and 25 years for plotting to assassinate President Mubarak and spying for a foreign power (Iran).

[1](#)3. (U) The Iranian, Mohammed Reda Hussein Dawst was convicted and sentenced (in absentia) to 25 years for espionage. Prosecutors alleged that Dawst was an operative of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and had recruited Dabbous to conduct surveillance and planning for potential terrorist operations in Egypt aimed at destabilizing the country including the assassination of President Mubarak.

[1](#)4. (C) Dabbous's lawyers alleged that their defendant's confessions had been made under torture and duress, but these claims were discounted by the judges. The three judge panel also denied defense motions to call witnesses from Saudi Arabia.

[1](#)5. (U) Egyptian diplomats quoted in the Cairo media said that the case had damaged a tentative thaw between Egypt and Iran, which severed diplomatic ties in 1979. Also according to media accounts, the Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned the head of the Egyptian interests section in Teheran to protest the GOE's trial and conviction of an Iranian diplomat, reportedly terming the move "irresponsible."

Three Taba Suspects Charged

[1](#)6. (SBU) Separately, on March 30, Maher Abdel Wahed, Egypt's public prosecutor, announced to the media that he was referring to trial three suspects in the October 7, 2004 bombings in and near the resort of Taba, on the Sinai's border with Israel, which left 34 persons dead. Those facing trial are Muhammad Gayez Sabah Hussein, Muhammad Abdallah Raba', and Muhammad Ahmed Saleh Feleifal, who is still at large. The prosecutor added that three others named earlier as suspects were being released for insufficient evidence. As is common in terrorism cases, the three will be tried in an emergency court, but no trial date has yet been announced.

Flaws in the Process

17. (C) Though the GOE made a point early on of discussing with the public its investigation in some detail, its accounts have not been entirely forthcoming. In its official statement of findings (ref E), the Ministry of Interior announced on October 25, 2004, that a total of nine suspects were involved in the planning and execution of the bombings, five of whom were in custody, two of whom died at the scene, and two of whom were at large. The Minister of the Interior, in a private meeting with the Ambassador (ref C), declined to supplement or add texture to this information.

18. (C) The precision and confidence of the GOE's October 25 account notwithstanding, several indicators raise questions about the ostensibly definitive findings. First, two shootouts near Ra's Sidr, on the west coast of the Sinai, one in late January and one in early February, left dead three "armed bedouin militants" identified in the media as suspects in the Taba bombings. Media reports also quoted security sources as saying they were in pursuit of three other wanted militants in the area. The three dead in clashes, and the three still being pursued, makes six wanted militants, four more than the two the government said were still at large in October.

19. (C) The government's information-gathering procedures in the course of its investigation raise further doubt about the finality of the government's October 25 account, not to mention serious human rights concerns. New York-based Human Rights Watch, and the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, HRW's Egyptian collaborators, have charged that up to 2400 persons were detained by the GOE for questioning, and HRW charged that as recently as February, hundreds remained in custody (ref A). HRW also asserted that many of the detainees were subject to mistreatment and abuse. (Comment: Tensions between the GOE and Bedouins are not new but have clearly been exacerbated in the wake of this investigation. End comment.)

110. (C) The GOE challenged HRW's figures, but did not categorically deny either mass arrests or the prolonged detention of a significant number of persons. A surprisingly resilient series of weekly demonstrations by female relatives of detainees continued through March, attracting media attention and no doubt embarrassing the GOE, which released several small batches of detainees during the month. While no one knows exactly how many remain in custody as of early April, it is difficult to reconcile the GOE's October assertions - that a total of nine people were involved in the bombing, and not connected to a wider terror network inside Egypt - with the significant prolonged detentions.

Comment

111. (C) The public nature of the Iranian trial indicates a GOE desire to send a message to Teheran that a diplomatic rapprochement is not in the cards. The Taba bombing indictments indicate a GOE desire to close out the matter, but as discussed above the facts of the case will make a convincingly neat wrap-up difficult to achieve. End comment.

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GRAY